



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

# Press Release

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## **CLEANUP COMPLETE AT SITE OF MASSIVE TIRE FIRE IN STANISLAUS COUNTY**

SACRAMENTO - The California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA) announced today that coordination between state agencies and departments has led to the environmental cleanup of one of California's most serious waste tire fire sites. The California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB), California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, working closely together for nearly seven years, recently completed the \$20 million cleanup of the Westley tire site.

"The potential damage to our water, air and land from fires at illegally stockpiled tires is enormous, and the return of this site to productive use is a credit to the cooperative efforts of our Cal/EPA team," said Cal/EPA Secretary Linda Adams. "Restoring this site to residential levels demonstrates the state's commitment to the surrounding community, and helps ensure the quality and integrity of the area's important waterways."

In September 1999, lightning ignited an illegal stockpile of more than 7 million tires at Oxford Tire Recycling, Inc. (OTR) in Westley, a small town in Stanislaus County. The flames from the fire released smoke and pollutants into the air, left burned ash, debris and oil waste behind, and contaminated soil and groundwater.

The property owners and businesses connected to the waste-to-energy facility were later found responsible in a civil suit brought by the state in 2000 for conditions that contributed to the fire. Altogether, the state has recovered \$11 million in cleanup costs from the responsible parties.

"The final certification of the Westley illegal tire site marks an important chapter in the Waste Board's clean up experience in managing waste tire fires," said Integrated Waste Management Board Chair Margo Reid Brown. "The Board's removal of almost 300,000 tons of contaminated waste at a cost of nearly \$20 million dollars helped clean up this former 7 million tire pile and has played a significant role in protecting the public and environment after the site caught fire."

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Taking a lead role among government agencies and offices in cleanup efforts, the CIWMB helped remove nearly 300,000 tons of fire-contaminated soil and debris, as well as the removal of more than 800,000 unburned tires in 2000.

"With the environmental cleanup complete at the Westley tire site, the property no longer presents a threat to human health or the environment," said DTSC Director Maureen Gorsen. "What it presents now is an opportunity at economic development and revitalization that can benefit local residents and businesses."

The DTSC, which oversaw the environmental cleanup at the site, officially certified the site making it eligible for unrestricted future land use. Technical assistance throughout the cleanup work was provided by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA) administers the state's environmental protection programs, which focus on restoring, preserving, and enhancing California's environmental quality and protecting public health.

The following is an historical timeline of events:

- Once known as Oxford Tire Recycling, Inc., (OTR) the site was permitted by CIWMB as a major waste tire facility in May 1996.
- In April 1997, OTR was issued a cleanup and abatement order by CIWMB.
- In June 1997, OTR entered into an agreement with the Modesto Energy Limited Partnership (MELP), a waste-to-energy facility at the site, to convert 4 million old tires into energy.
- Over the intervening years, the state battled in courts to force the owners of the 40-acre tire stockpile to eliminate the massive collection that dated back to the 1950s and numbered as high as 30 million tires at one time.
- In July 1999, the Executive Director of CIWMB issued another cleanup order giving the owners 12 months to remove the tires.
- In September 1999, lightning ignited the illegal stockpile. It burned for 34 days, emitting smoke and pollutants into the air, leaving burned ash, debris and oil waste, and contaminating soil and groundwater.
- The United States Environmental Protection Agency conducted the fire suppression work at the site.

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- CIWMB led government efforts to remove debris. DTSC oversaw environmental cleanup, and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board provided technical assistance.
- In 2000, DTSC issued an imminent and substantial endangerment determination to property owners Edward and Mary Filbin, as well as other individuals and businesses associated with MELP.
- In April 2000, then California Attorney General Bill Lockyer filed a civil suit against the responsible parties seeking millions of dollars in penalties and restitution.
- The lawsuit was settled in the summer of 2005. The state has recovered \$11 million in cleanup costs from the Filbins and other "responsible parties" that include Cal Neva Ranch Co., and at least eight companies and their related business entities affiliated with the waste-to-energy facility.
- Legislation signed in January 2001 provided \$6 million annually in state funds for cleanup of illegal tire piles around the state, including the Westley tire fire site.
- In March 2007, Cal/EPA announces that cleanup at the massive tire fire in Stanislaus County is now complete.

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